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Minutes 11/08/2011

Tri-Community Working Group Meeting Minutes -- 11/8/2011

The Tuesday, November 8, 2011 meeting of the Tri-Community Working Group for Flooding Issues was held at 6:00 pm, in the second-floor meeting room of Arlington Town Hall.

Attending:

Wayne Chouinard
Elsie C. Fiore
Roger Frymire
Stephen Kaiser
Michael Rademacher
Stephen Revilak
Clarissa Rowe
Michael Santoro

Approval of September 13th Meeting Minutes

The September 13, 2011 meeting minutes were approved.

Discussion of Legislation Filed by Rep. Garballey for an Alewife Flooding Study

The legislation in question was House Bill H.2752, which reads

"Notwithstanding any general or special law to the contrary, the Boston Metropolitan Area Planning Council shall conduct a study of potential flood storage locations and water quality improvements in the Alewife Brook watershed in the Cities of Cambridge and Somerville, and in the Towns of Arlington and Belmont."

H.2752 calls for an appropriation of \$100,000 to fund this study. The full text of H.2752 may be found at <http://www.malegislature.gov/Bills/187/House/H02752>.

Representative Garballey and Arlington Selectwoman Diane Mahon initiated this legislation, to study the potential effects of using areas near the Lake Street exit of Route 2 for flood storage, rather than for new development. (For example, the site of the old "Faces" building.)

There were no objections to this study.

Steve Kaiser believes that we need independent reviews of FEMA's Alewife Brook flooding studies.

MWRA's Request for Qualifications for Alewife CSO Improvements

This discussion concerned the Requests for Qualification Statements/Proposals (RFQP) for MWRA Project 6952, Alewife Brook CSO Improvements. This project will take place in the vicinity of the Fresh Pond Shopping Mall; it is a joint effort between the MWRA and the City of Cambridge, and Project 6952 covers the MWRA's portion of the work.

These improvements are required by the Boston Harbor Plan. The MWRA will install a siphon under the Alewife MTBA station, and this siphon will provide sewer relief. MWRA will add a modulating gate to the CAM003 CSO,

which will allow the outlet to be remotely controlled. The project will also increase the diameter of Somerville CSO outlets, to reduce the frequency of CSO events.

Steve Kaiser believes that the number of CSOs without flap gates will become an issue. The absence of flap gates will allow water to flow back into sewers during storm events. Mr. Kaiser believes that the CSO improvement will not affect Alewife Brook flooding, but could reduce the number of CSO events.

Elsie Fiore believes that the Cambridge work will have little benefit for the Town of Arlington.

Elsie Fiore asked who would be responding to the RFQP. Clarissa Rowe stated that engineering firms are typically the ones who respond to RFQPs. RFQPs largely involve engineering design work.

MWRA's North System Hydraulic Study

The MWRA has many sanitary sewer overflows (SSOs) in the Mystic River watershed. The EPA has asked the MWRA to conduct studies, to determine if the number of SSOs could be reduced. AECOM will perform these studies.

The North System Hydraulic Study will primarily target MWRA infrastructure improvements, but the scope of the study is not limited to infrastructure. One of the goals is to perform a thorough cost/benefit analysis for MWRA sewer system improvements.

Steve Kaiser stated that the study will include nearly all of the Mystic River Watershed, and will examine the sewage outflows of each community. The study will attempt to determine pipe capacity throughout the system. Once pipe capacities have been modeled, five storms will be provided as input to the model, to predict where SSO events will occur. One of these five storms will be based on the 2006 Mother's Day storm, which was a five-year event. Mr. Kaiser supports the concept of the study, and commends the MWRA for this undertaking.

Roger Frymire believes that the study will model a variety of storms, from six-month to ten-year events. Currently, SSO events occur every 9-10 months in the MWRA system.

The group would like to invite the MWRA to a future meeting, to discuss the North System Hydraulic Study.

2012 Meeting Schedule

The group decided that future meetings should be held at 6:00 pm. This time may not be convenient for everyone, but it seems to be convenient for most.

In December, Clarissa will send a list of proposed meeting dates for 2012. In general, Tri-Community meetings will be held every other month, on the second Tuesday of the month.

Other Business

Conditional Letter of Map Revision concerning Development at Discovery Park. Arlington DPW director Mike Rademacher was asked to review a Conditional Letter of Map Revision (CLOMR) concerning a Cambridge development project. The project in question would add three new buildings to Discovery Park in Cambridge, at the former Arthur D. Little site. The project developer may request a letter of map amendment (LOMA); a LOMA request will require comment from all communities where work is taking place. FEMA maps have changed since the project was originally permitted, and the developer must re-apply for permits under the new maps.

In the Town of Arlington, this project involves the removal of one building. The removal of this building will not impact flooding conditions.

With the new maps, FEMA has asked for additional floodway modeling. The CLOMR states that floodway elevation will increase by one inch, which is not enough to change the area's overall flood elevation. The change in floodway elevation requires the developer to notify all abutters, including a number of private residential properties in Arlington. FEMA will not conduct further study until affected communities acknowledge the CLOMR study. Affected communities need only acknowledge receipt of the CLOMR study, even if they decline to provide comment. AECOM is performing the CLOMR study.

Steve Kaiser made some technical points about floodways and floodway elevation. A floodway is an area that conveys flood water, and you are not allowed to obstruct floodways. In nearly all cases, a change in floodway elevation will cause a change to floodway boundaries. The previous (1982) floodway boundary followed the bank of Little River. The new floodway boundary would impact surrounding buildings.

Steve Kaiser asked for clarification as to whether the study was attempting to show "no impact" or "minimal impact". The study was attempting to show minimal impact.

Conduit Installation Along Mass. Ave. Roger Frymire observed workers installing conduit on the Cambridge side of Alewife Brook, in the vicinity of Mass Ave. Other attendees speculated that this may have been utility work, as opposed to work done for the closure of Cambridge CSOs. (There were no attendees from the City of Cambridge to comment.)

Continuity of Discussions. Steve Kaiser will draft a list of projects that he believes the group should watch over time, for the purpose of continuity. Example include Contract 12, and any work that FEMA is doing. Steve would like to see us revive something along the lines of Will Brownsberger's Progress Report (circa 2007).

DEP. The Department of Environmental Protection (DEP) is undergoing budget and personell cuts. As a result, the DEP will have to rethink its process for regulatory enforcement. Steve Kaiser believes that the DEP could be more creative in the way it works. For example, the DEP and several Massachusetts State offices are working together to achieve 30-40% enery reduction. Are there ways where we could work with the DEP to develop innovative ideas for dealing with flooding issues?

The meeting adjourned at approximately 7:00 pm.